CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND SIXTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 3 September 1998, at 10.25 a.m.

President: Mr. Soutar (United Kingdom)

GE.98-63466 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 806th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Dear colleagues, we open our proceedings today on a sombre note. I am sure that you will have listened with dismay to the reports of the tragic accident involving Swissair Flight 111. This flight number, of course, is familiar to many of us and the fact that its destination was our host city of Geneva means that this tragedy strikes close to home. I should like to express our sympathy to Ambassador Hofer, and through him to the Swiss authorities and people on this tragic event. Our thoughts and sympathies go out to all the victims and bereaved of whatever nationality they may be.

Mr. HOFER (Switzerland) (translated from French): On behalf of the Swiss delegation and my Government and of the victims' families and friends, I should like to thank you for the many proofs of sympathy that you and the Conference have shown in connection with this terrible disaster. You can be assured that the Conference's messages will be passed on to the people concerned, to our authorities and to all the families stricken by this catastrophe.

The PRESIDENT: I have on my list of speakers for today the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee under item 1 of the agenda entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Effective International Arrangements to Assure Non-Nuclear-Weapon States Against the Use or Threat of Use of Nuclear Weapons, and the representative of Israel. As I informed you at the informal plenary meeting held yesterday, I intend also to report to you on the consultations the presidency has held pursuant to paragraph 1 of decision CD/1501, which requires the President to "pursue intensive consultations and seek the views of its Members on appropriate methods and approaches for dealing with agenda item 1 entitled 'Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament', taking into consideration all proposals and views on this item".

I should now like to give the floor to Ambassador Mark Moher of Canada, who will introduce the report of the Ad Hoc Committee under item 1 of the agenda entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", as contained in document CD/1555.

Mr. MOHER (Canada): As you have already done, I draw the attention of the plenary to document CD/1555 of 1 September 1998 which contains the report of the Ad Hoc Committee under item 1 of the agenda entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament". It is my pleasure, on behalf of the Ad Hoc Committee, to submit this report to the plenary for its consideration and adoption. In doing so, I wish to express my appreciation to all members of the Ad Hoc Committee for the very constructive and substantive approach taken to the work of the Ad Hoc Committee in the sessions that we have held, and I would also like to thank the secretariat, in particular Mr. Zaleski, who is the Secretary of the Ad Hoc Committee, for all of their help over the last period of days.

The PRESIDENT: I should like to thank the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee for the presentation of his report. At this stage, I understand that the report of the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Effective International Arrangements to Assure Non-Nuclear-Weapon States Against the Use or Threat of Use of Nuclear Weapons, as contained in document CD/1554, is even now being distributed to the Conference. In the circumstances, Ambassador de Icaza, could I ask you to present the report formally, sir?

Mr. de ICAZA (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): As this is the first time that I have taken the floor in a formal plenary of the Conference since you assumed the presidency, I wish to repeat the congratulations that I have already conveyed to you in informal plenaries and to offer you my delegation's cooperation in the discharge of your very important duties.

On 16 March last the Conference established the Ad Hoc Committee under item 4 of the agenda to negotiate for the purpose of reaching agreements on effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. On 14 May the Conference on Disarmament did me the honour of appointing me Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee, for which honour and trust I express my appreciation.

The Committee held nine meetings and exchanged interesting views on security assurances, especially concerning their purpose and the nature and scope of those that have been given so far. A summary of the views that were expressed is annexed to, and forms an integral part of the report that was adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee at its ninth meeting on the first of this month, that is, the day before yesterday.

On behalf of the Committee, I submit to the plenary of the Conference document CD/1554, which contains this self-explanatory report. I would like to express my thanks to the delegations that participated in the work and to the secretariat of the Conference, and very particularly to Mr. Vladimir Bogomolov, for the support extended to the Chairman of the Committee.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee for the presentation of his report and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. To paraphrase the Duke of Wellington on another occasion, the circulation of this report was "a damned close thing". Thank you very much, secretariat.

In accordance with past practice, it is my intention to put the two reports that were introduced by Ambassador de Icaza and Ambassador Moher, as contained in documents CD/1554 and CD/1555 respectively, for adoption by the Conference at the next plenary meeting on Tuesday, 8 September 1998.

Mr. LAMDAN (Israel): Since I shall be relinquishing my post in Geneva in October, I take the floor to take my leave of you, the delegates to the Conference on Disarmament. But at the outset though, I should like to join in the expressions of sympathy and, I fear, condolence to the Swiss Government and people on the terrible tragedy they have suffered today.

(Mr. Lamdan, Israel)

It has in fact been a genuine pleasure and a privilege to work with you all over the last four years. I would also salute several colleagues, in absentia, as it were, who made their mark on the CD over the period but who, given the nature of our profession, have moved on elsewhere.

I shall leave with some enduring memories - of serious, and sometimes less than serious debate; of swift and occasionally cutting repartee; of surrealistic exchanges in the midst of tense negotiations; of moments of grand theatre which left one wondering whether one was witness to a Greek tragedy or simple burlesque, of "Smiling Buddhas", of intimate definitions of "irresistible desires" and of theological exegesis on the subtle differences between "on" and "under" in the English language. But in the main, I shall leave with memories of men and women of character and integrity, attempting to grapple with the agonizing dilemmas of disarmament, which, if left unresolved, will gravely affect the future of mankind and, I dare say, of humanity as we know them today.

I leave also with some feelings of achievement, or at least of having been party to a positive process which, despite the prophets of gloom, is moving forward, however slowly. I had a hand in Israel's acceptance, together with others, as a full member of this Conference. I took a modest part in the negotiations on CTBT, to whose text Israel made significant contributions and which Israel was among the first to sign. Recently, it fell to me to deliver my Government's decision not to stand in the way of negotiations on an FMCT. Something has been achieved over the last four years, and the CD looks set to achieve more over the next few years.

Israel is not given to making programmatic speeches on a periodic basis about our national positions. It was indeed over a year after becoming a member of the CD that the Director-General of our Foreign Ministry attended this forum in September 1997 and set out those positions in some detail. Their fundamentals are likely to remain constant for the foreseeable future. They revolve essentially around two points. First, that for us disarmament is a regional issue, embracing all countries of the Middle East and to be negotiated directly by them. Second, that peacemaking precedes disarmament. Confidence-building measures on the way to peace, certainly - but disarmament before making peace, and before putting that peace to the test, is foolhardy and scarcely a viable policy for national defence.

We are also not in the habit of politicizing the debates at the CD. Whilst it is obvious that the CD deals with matters heavy with political import, this forum is not the General Assembly of the United Nations, nor the Security Council nor, for that matter, the Commission on Human Rights. It is a negotiating body, the sole multilateral forum for the negotiation of international instruments in the area of disarmament. We would be derelict in our duty if we allowed the CD to be sidetracked by political squabbling or if it were to lose its primary raison d'être.

At the same time, I must admit that it has taken almighty efforts of self-restraint on my part not to reply to the jibes and the hectoring of certain members of the CD from the Middle East region. Two of them, in

(Mr. Lamdan, Israel)

particular, never miss a trick, even though they choose to forget that it was their declared policies in the 1950s and the 1960s of destroying Israel, root and branch, which obliged us to assume our defensive posture. One of them even takes umbrage at references to our national security, which, to say the least, is bizarre, considering what the CD is about.

One last, serious word. If I may, I would like to invite members to contemplate the unhappy fact that Israel lives in a dangerous place. We do not have the comfort of residing in the antipodes. We do not have the reassurance of being part of a powerful military alliance or even living under its umbrella. In the Bible, we were promised a "land flowing with milk and honey". Perhaps God should have added a footnote to the effect that, in time, our region would be overflowing with arms and animosity. One CD member in the Middle East is clearly embarked on a programme of military nuclearization, despite its posturing and protestations to the contrary - and in witness thereof, it recently tested a new and powerful delivery system. Another has had its nuclear programme dismantled by the Security Council, but would doubtless be disposed to resume it, given half a chance. Several Middle Eastern countries have extensive programmes for weapons of mass destruction. Israel is bound to remain vigilant. We shall continue to adopt positions in this forum with the greatest of discretion and deliberateness, wholly in accordance with our national security interests.

At the same time, we are committed to the processes of disarmament and to the work of this Conference. We are also committed to a world freed from the threat of arms, both conventional and non-conventional, in which all can live at peace. We will continue to do our part. Hence, let me wish you all success in the future endeavours of the CD, in the hope that this is not merely a farewell but that, in the fullness of time, your efforts - our combined efforts - will culminate in a "farewell to arms", duly negotiated, in full transparency and by consensus.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Israel for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. In view of the fact that we will be having a drafting session later on this morning, I will refrain from offering advice on the drafting of the commitment received by Israel from the Almighty.

Mr. Ambassador, seriously, as the first representative of your country to the Conference on Disarmament since your country's admission as a full member of the Conference, you have had to present and defend the positions of your Government on the issues under discussion in the Conference. You have done so, sir, with authority, perseverance and diplomatic talent. I have certainly enjoyed working with you, sir, and I should like to express to you and your family our very best wishes for continued success and personal happiness.

Mr. AFZAL (Pakistan): Mr. President, may I join you and others in extending our condolences to the Government of Switzerland on this tragedy of which we heard this morning.

(Mr. Afzal, Pakistan)

My intervention is to inform the Conference that my delegation has requested the CD secretariat to circulate the following documents as official documents of the Conference. These are: the statement by Mr. Gohar Ayub Khan, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, made in the Conference on 19 March 1998; the statement by Ambassador Munir Akram made in the Conference on 14 May 1998; the statement by Ambassador Munir Akram made in the Conference on 2 June 1998; and the statement by Ambassador Munir Akram made in the Conference on 30 July 1998. I have also to request you that these documents be included in the list of other documents in the report to the General Assembly which we are negotiating at this moment.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Pakistan and I am grateful to him for having given me advance warning of his statement. The request is noted.

I would like at this stage to report to the Conference on the consultations which the presidency has undertaken, in accordance with paragraph 1 of decision CD/1501, to seek the views of members of the Conference on appropriate methods and approaches for dealing with agenda item 1. I am doing so today in order that the Conference can consider my findings before we meet to adopt the annual report on Tuesday next.

As the Conference is aware, on Wednesday, 19 August, I convened informal open-ended consultations to allow delegations to express their points of view following the adoption of decision CD/1547. I repeat, I was grateful to those delegations who took part for the constructive and forward-looking manner in which they set out their positions. The exchange of views which took place revealed a divergence of opinion between those delegations who believed that the Conference should now concentrate its energies on launching the negotiations for a ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, which they regarded as the next, necessary step towards nuclear disarmament, and those who believed that the Conference needs also to establish an ad hoc committee or some other mechanism for addressing nuclear disarmament. Indeed, the distinguished representative of Chile, Ambassador Illanes, speaking on behalf of the Group of 21, recalled that nuclear disarmament remained the "highest priority" for his Group. Other speakers pointed to the fact that a number of proposals for addressing nuclear disarmament, including those presented during previous sessions, remained on the table, and should be taken up. It was also suggested that the presidency should investigate the possibility of attempting a synthesis of existing proposals to see whether a basis for consensus might be established.

In the short period which has elapsed since these informal consultations I have consulted individual delegations and the coordinators of the regional groups. These consultations have confirmed the importance which is attached to finding a satisfactory basis for dealing with agenda item 1. However, there remain differing views on precisely what that basis should be. In my judgement, and despite the assurances of flexibility and moderation which I have received from all quarters, delegations' positions are still too far apart to be bridged even through the most ingenious drafting.

(The President)

There is now no prospect of agreeing at this session on the establishment of any further mechanism to address nuclear disarmament. I therefore believe that the mandate given to successive presidencies by decision CD/1501, which relates to the Conference's 1998 programme of work, is technically spent. Nevertheless, given the importance of this issue, I assume that delegations would not wish this report to be the last word on the subject. Indeed, despite the inconclusive outcome, a number of delegations have told me that they have found the consultative process initiated by decision CD/1501 to be useful and that they would favour its continuation in some form or other. I would like, therefore, to recommend that the Troika consultations which arose from paragraph 1 of CD/1501 resume at the start of the 1999 session of the Conference on Disarmament.

Before adjourning, I should like to remind you that we will hold an informal plenary meeting immediately following this plenary meeting, in order to address the outstanding issues concerning our draft annual report to the United Nations General Assembly. This concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Tuesday, 8 September 1998, at 10 a.m., at which time I intend to proceed to the adoption of our draft annual report to the fifty-third session of the United Nations General Assembly and to conclude the 1998 session of the Conference.

Mr. SHISHECHIHA (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, since this is the first time I take the floor, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference at this juncture.

I would also like to add my voice to the previous speakers and express my delegation's condolences to the Government and people of Switzerland on the Swissair crash.

Just for the record, one delegation referred to the source of instability and danger in the Middle East. The source of instability in this region is not hidden from anyone, either in the region of the Middle East or in other regions of the world. It goes without saying that the unsafeguarded nuclear facilities and other programmes for production of weapons of mass destruction are the main source of instability and rearmament in the region. Again just for the record, I officially announce here that the recent missile test in my country is solely for defence purposes and does not threaten any country in the world.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Iran and for his kind words addressed to the Chair.

Mr. de ICAZA (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, my delegation listened carefully to the report that you were kind enough to give us today with regard to the presidential consultations on agenda item 1. I think that it would be important for this report to be circulated so that we can have it and analyse it thoroughly, and that reference should be made to this plenary in the Conference's report in the same way as references are included to the reports that have been given by the Special Coordinators on other items.

The PRESIDENT: You have all heard the request of the Ambassador of Mexico. I am flattered that he wishes to accord status to my report that my predecessors did not apparently enjoy, but I have obviously no objection.

Mr. GREY (United States of America): My understanding is that normally on these reports you only have the reports of Ad Hoc Committees in the official report. If we were to include your statement in the report, I should like also to include the reports of the Special Coordinators as well.

The PRESIDENT: Ambassador de Icaza, I am just trying to establish in my own mind the precise extent of your request: it is that the statement I have just made should be circulated as a CD document?

Mr. de ICAZA (translated from Spanish): Yes, sir, I would like reference to be made to it in the report just as reference is made in the report to the reports of the Special Coordinators.

The PRESIDENT: You are asking for the statement which I have just made to be distributed as a CD document and for reference to be made to it in the report which we will be considering shortly? That's a 'yes'?

Mr. de ICAZA (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, in paragraph 16 of the draft report mention is made of a report presented by the Special Coordinator on expansion; in paragraph 19 we speak of a report presented by the Special Coordinator on the review of the agenda, and so on and so on. It's necessary that, with regard to this very important item on which the presidency was entrusted with holding special consultations and for which the presidency itself took responsibility, reference be made to the fact that the President gave his final report and that that final report appears in document such and such.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. I see no objection to proceeding as you have suggested.

I see no other speakers. This plenary stands adjourned.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.